

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	Religion and Foreign Policy: The Case of Saudi Arabia
Author of the thesis:	Samir Mammadov
Referee (incl. titles):	Mgr.Martin Riegl,PhD.

Remark: It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	13
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	12
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	14
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	11
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	18
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)	68
The proposed grade (1-2-3-4)	B - good

You can even use a decimal point (e.g. giving the grade of 2.5 for 60 points).

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background:

Mr. Mammadov works with the theory of rational choice, realism and theory of ideology, Huntington's clash of civilizations, which are definitely relevant to the researched topics allows the reader to understand the potential conclusions that are expected from the master level thesis. Theoretical part is definitely well researched part of the reviewed thesis. Regarding the theoretical framework of the paper I do miss major geopolitical theories of Mackinder, Spykman, Cohen or Brzezinski, which are ingored by the author.

The hypotheses are mentioned in the thesis project only, but not in the thesis itself. Therefore I do award 13 points for this thesis aspect.

2) Contribution:

The author has chosen an interesting and relevant topic – religious factor in foreign policy (case study of Saudi Arabia). The thesis itself has a well defined and clear structure which flows throughout the whole thesis, which is divided into five chapters. Particular chapters explain the influence of religion within the country, the impact of religion on political system, priorities and aids of Saudi foreign policy, race for regional dominance between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the relation of Saudi Arabia with the USA.

Hypotheses are undoubtedly relevant, but the main objective of the thesis "The main intention of this thesis is to enhance understanding of one of the major geo-political actors and powers in the Gulf and wider Middle East. Saudi Arabia, as a core state of the Islamic religion, has a central role not only in the Muslim world but, with its huge oil reserves, globally"...is at least the statement for wider geopolitical discussion. Such statements underestimates the role of other regional powers like Iran, Turkey or Egypt. The author has definitely succeeded in his analysis of the religion as the determining of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. Also part of the thesis give an impression of subjective opinion which is not supported by any academic source. So I decided to award 12 points only.

3) Methods:

Regarding methodology empirical-analytical and integrative approach is applied along with qualitative study methods. I do not identify any major deficiency in this aspect of the thesis and decided to award 14 points for methodological part of the thesis.

4) Literature:

The author has successfully managed to identify relevant sources (in English, Czech and Russian) and proven his ability to analyze them critically. I have to point at the above mentioned fact that key geopolitical theories are missing – Cohen, Mackinder, Spykman, Kaplan (2011, 2012), Nye (2010), Brzezinski (2012). I do not understand the reason for not having worked with these sources. Especially when Mr. Mammadov explicitly uses theoretical concepts of above mentioned authors like “soft power”. *Saudi Arabia uses this religious ideology as a tool of “soft power” (p.20).*

On the other side I do not see any relevancy in quoting a short video showing Z. Brzezinski’s speech to Mujahedeens. This seems to be even inappropriate bias, which seriously reduces the academic value of reviewed thesis. Generally I do find literature review below average. Therefore I decided to reduce number of points to 11.

5) Manuscript form:

In spite of minor insufficiencies (e.g. sources are not listed in alphabetical order, rare misspellings) whole thesis (case study) meets all formal criteria for diploma thesis required by Faculty of Social Science. On the other side the thesis would need at least one editing (see the format of list of sources). Generally the thesis itself exceeds minimal required content.

DATE OF EVALUATION:

Referee Signature

The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant for this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts omitted? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently incorporated with the topic and hypotheses tested?

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the policy implications well founded?

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

3) METHODS: Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further verification and testing? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or irrelevant detours off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 10 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way and disposes with a representative bibliography. (Remark: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**). If they dominate you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give much better impression.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate language and style, including academic **format** for quotations, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Czech grading	US grading
81 – 100	1	= excellent	= A
61 – 80	2	= good	= B
51 – 60	3	= satisfactory	= C
41 – 50	3	= satisfactory	= D
0 – 40	4	= fail	= not recommended for defence